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# SILK AND SILVER: THE TRADE AND ORGANIZATION OF NEW JULFA AT THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

by

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The group of Armenians known as the merchants of New Julfa, or sometimes erroneously as "Persians" in Europe[1], lived in exile in Iran under Safavid rule for over a century. The genealogies of the most important families of this community have been recorded and preserved in the archives of New Julfa. An analysis of their contents was published into a unique history of New Julfa in the late nineteenth century[2]. Recently, two documents in Armenian, an account book and a commercial manual, have been the subject of close scholarly attention[3]. A recent publication in Erevan has examined ties between the merchants of New Julfa and the Russians[4]. Aside from a few articles on one or two aspects of their lives[5], the commercial importance of this group has remained unexplored, for the last part of the century, save by the scholars in Erevan who have concentrated on presenting the crucial sources. The following article is a brief synopsis of a section of an extensive study of the commercial system of this group[6]. In that work, the Armenian sources have been com-

[1] This is clear in the French archives where "Gentilhomme Persan" is used to refer to some Armenian merchants. It was also current in the Dutch usage, see: Van Rooy 1966, p. 353.

[2] Tēr Yovhaneanc' 1980. This is a translation into modern Armenian of the first posthumus edition 1880.

[3] Xač'ikyan, P'ap'azyan 1984. This work is a thorough ten-year study of a unique account book sent from Portugal to Armenia by Robert Gulbenkian. Also a short, preliminary study of the commercial manual, a treasury of weights and measures which was published in 1699, has come from the scholar who presented this very important document nearly twenty years ago. Kévonian 1975. Unfortunately, no one has since picked up the thread of his research.

[4] Xač'ikyan 1988.

[5] Gregorian 1974.

[6] Baghdiantz 1993.

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bined with the narrations of European travellers who were typically merchants themselves, plus some archival materials, to obtain an image of the commercial activity and social life of these merchants. The Armenian sources provide a wealth of information about accounting, organization, and commercial routes and products, while the observations of the European merchants provide details about the Armenians' social life absent in the commercial documents, as well as crucial information on their commerce itself.

During the protracted wars between the Safavids and Ottomans, Armenian families were deported as a matter of policy from the towns and villages the Safavids conquered. Among these was the prosperous village of Julfa, located in Naxiǰewan in historic Armenia. The merchants of this town had been unusually successful, and had maintained many contacts with the West as silk merchants. They regularly paid heavy tribute to both the Ottomans and the Safavids in order to preserve the peace necessary for their prosperity[7]. In 1604, when Shah ʿAbbās ordered the deportation of the entire population of Julfa, they were given special attention, and not as brutally deported as most others, because the Shah did not want the merchants to lose the ready capital and the skill they were bringing into his realm. They were given three days to leave their homes and cross the river Araxes. The Persian troops were ordered by the Shah in person, present on the scene. Despite the extraordinary measures taken, this deportation caused much suffering. To make this move a final one the whole village was immediately burnt[8]. They were resettled in a suburb of the new Persian capital of Isphahan. This suburb came to be known from then on as New Julfa, *Nor J̌ułay* in Armenian, in remembrance of their former home.

The name New Julfa has been used, without much precision, to refer to the whole of the southern Armenian suburb of Isphahan. What most of the travellers of the seventeenth century referred to as New Julfa was the suburb of Isphahan on the South bank of the Zayendeh Rud, an area

[7] "This town was much endangered in the warres betwixt Amurat the great Turke, and Mahomet Codibanda, the Persian King, ready to be swallowed up of both… To avoid which danger, these poor Chulfalini were glad to present the Persian Prince with greater and more liberal gifts, then they did their enemy Bassae [the Ottoman governor of Erevan? *Bassae of Reiuan*, undoubtedly described as Turkish in the text]. Thus these miserable people in the midst of armes and squadrons of the enemy, were constrained, what with presents, what with lies, notably to preserve their liberties, and their lives in safety." in CARTWRIGHT 1611, pp. 35-36.

[8] AŘAKʿEL VARDAPET DAWRIŽECʿI, ed 1990. Chapter V of this unique primary source describes the deportation from Julfa. That Julfa was burnt is corroborated by several travellers.

inhabited exclusively by the Armenians merchants settled there by Shah ʿAbbās the First, and the oldest settled neighborhood of the suburb. This is only a part of what has always been loosely designated as New Julfa in the few studies concerning the suburb[9]. At the end of the seventeenth century, and as it is today, New Julfa comprised eight different neighborhoods: Great Maidan, Little Maidan, Erevan, Tabriz (or Mahlat), Łarageł (or Gazg), Čarsou, Kʿočʿer, Yakobǰanencʿ[10]. This is not, however, the New Julfa to which the travellers refer. Gabriel de Chinon solely refers to the older part of the suburb, settled between 1606 and 1614 with the Armenian merchants of the Armenian town of Julfa. It is important to make that distinction because the administration of this older neighborhood was distinct from the rest of the suburb settled later under Shah ʿAbbās the Second in the middle of the century. References here to the administration of New Julfa only concern the older section of the suburb, for it always remained administratively distinct from the rest.

The land underneath this older section had been royal land, but was ceded as a gift exclusively to the Julfans by Shah ʿAbbās the First by means of several royal edicts[11]. The main artery of New Julfa was, and still remains, Nazar Avenue. Named after the richest and most prominent merchant of the time, it is 3276 paces long and 16 paces wide[12]. It now defines the border of New Julfa, but used to be at its center. The richest merchants lived on the north side of this avenue, close to the river bank. This northern section has since disappeared. Nazar Avenue, was divided into two sections. At the western gate of Šafraz lived the adherents to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and at the eastern gate of Šahriman lived the Roman Catholics. The names again derive from the two of the four foremost merchant families of those respective faiths[13]. The group residing within its gates was a privileged one.

A passage in Gabriel de Chinon refers to New Julfa as a small republic: "The King gave the government of this small Republic to Coaga Safar, Armenian; afterwards to his brother who was called Coaga Nazar, father of the one who is governing them at present[14]." This is the same

[9] The only source to clearly make this necessary distinction is the history of New Julfa by Tēr Yovhaneancʿ 1980, volume I, pp. 47-49.

[10] See the map in: Carswell 1968, pp. 19-20. The alternative names for the neighborhoods come from Tēr Yovhaneancʿ 1980, volume I, p. 49.

[11] These edicts are translated into Armenian and published *in extenso* in Tēr Yovhaneancʿ 1980, volume I, pp. 44-47.

[12] Tēr Yovhaneancʿ 1980, volume I, p. 48.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] "Le Roi donna le gouvernement de cette petite République, à Coaga Safar,

Šafraz family after whom the Western gate of the suburb is named. This names a whole section of New Julfa after one of the four major families of the suburb. Nazar Avenue, the main artery was named after the second kalāntar mentioned in this quotation. Each neighborhood, *tasneak*, had a chief, or headman, called a *tasnakawag*, whose family name in turn became the name of the neighborhood. After many successions of this function within one family, the family in charge of the neighborhood might have changed, but the family name designating the neighborhood remained the same. As a rule, older names predominated. The office of *tasnakawag* was always given[15] to the most important merchant in a given neighborhood. There were twenty subdivisions to this part of New Julfa, each represented by a *tasnakawag* at the regular meetings of the municipal council[16]. All matters internal to New Julfa which did not concern the Church or the Persian court were administered by the reunions (*žołov*) of these neighborhood chiefs, presided over by the *kalāntar*. The *kalāntar* was the single most important official among the Armenians. Among the many responsibilities within his jurisdiction was the selection of the heads of the neighborhoods.

The small passage quoted above from Gabriel de Chinon provides several accurate details about the post of *kalāntar*[17]: First, he was appointed by the Shah, and functioned as the governor of the community. Also, the post usually was hereditary, remaining in the same family for generations. Khoja Safar himself was the wealthiest merchant in his community. Gabriel de Chinon further elaborates that Khoja Safar's

Arménien; ensuite à son frère qui s'appelait Coaga Nazar, père de celui qui les gouverne à present." CHINON 1671, p. 254. Also cited in CARSWELL 1968, p. 78.

[15] This office was appointed by the Kalāntar, as will be shown later.

[16] The names of these *Tasnakawag* are listed by TĒR YOVHANEANC' 1980. He extracted them from promissory notes written in New Julfa. The example he lists in his footnotes is a late one (1735). See note 6 in the 1980 edition, p. 50, in volume I. He lists the twenty names of the *Tasnakawag*: Dilak'enc', Mec Xoǰēnc', Firməsēnc', Gilanēnc', Bałramēnc', Awagēnc', Mirmanēnc', Zekeanc', Israēlēnc', Fanosēnc', Top'č'ēnc', J̌axat'unēnc', Łoč'łarēnc', T'ałvalēnc', Ałiǰanēnc', Tēr Ananēnc', Mušełēnc', Łaradanēnc', Awag Ēdanēnc', and Dawt'ēnc'. Xač'ikyan recognizes the twenty names of the *Tasnakawag* for 1671. This is an indication that the subdivisions into twenty neighborhoods remained constant, at least between 1671 and 1735. See XAČ'IKYAN 1988, pp. 49-50.

[17] The post of kalāntar under the Safavid has thouroughly been studied by LAMBTON 1963, pp. 206-218. According to her the administrative system of the Safavids had its roots in Aq Quyunlu political organization. The word kalāntar is present in the post-Ilkhan period when the word *rā'īs* declines. The kalāntar of Isphahan was mainly concerned with guild supervision. The Armenians had their own kalāntar who also was an Armenian, and acted as the provost of the merchants. A. K. Lambton's study further supports evidence that the Armenians were autonomous from the rest of the administrative system since they did not fall under the jurisdiction of the *kalāntar* of Isphahan.

brother Nazar succeeded him, and that at the death of Khoja Nazar, his own son Khoja Šafraz assumed the position of *kalāntar* of New Julfa. He affirms that Khoja Šafraz had the most beautiful and richly furnished house in all the country, excluding the royal palace. Gabriel de Chinon estimates Khoja Šafraz's wealth at 12,000 tūmāns[18]. His total worth constantly augmented due to commerce carried out by other merchants in his service[19].

New Julfa was administratively autonomous, governed by the Armenian merchants themselves, except in matters directly concerning the Persian court. For such matters, which fell under Persian jurisdiction, the *kalāntar* was the intermediary between the Shah and the Armenian community. The scope of the internal administrative affairs of New Julfa was vast. The municipal reunions discussed and settled such diverse matters as: the collection of the royal taxes, water distribution among the many houses and gardens of New Julfa, the security of the suburb, and the guarding and closing of the gates. New Julfa was walled and protected by several gates. All Moslem visitors were required to leave the suburb by nightfall[20]. Beyond such purely local matters, the reunions were a general forum for discussing the security of the commercial routes, commercial taxation and merchant affairs. The merchants also had powerful impact on the Church which they financially supported, and often influenced the election of Church officials. Important religious matters pertaining to the community as a whole also fell within the pale of their

[18] There were 50 *ʿabbāsīs* to the Persian *tūmān,* according to Yovhannēs' account book. The *tūmān* in 1686 was equivalent to 306.4 grams of silver. By this time the silver content of the *ʿabbāsīs* must have been altered. Except for last years, the Persian coins had remained stable throughout the century. For coinage and equivalences at the beginning of the century, see: STEENSGAARD 1973, p. 420. For the value of Safavid *dinārs* 1510-1718, see *The Cambridge History of Iran: vol. 6*, p. 566. For the end of the century, Tavernier gives the equivalence of the *ʿabbāsī* to French coinage:

*réale* or French *ecu* = 3 *ʿabbāsī* and one shāhī (shāhī or *chayet* is 1/4 of an *ʿabbāsī*)
*réale* = 60 *sols* and the *ʿabbāsī* = 18 *sols* and 6 *deniers*

All the coins were round, and none of them had the portrait of the King in the manner of European coinage. They simply bore his name on one side, the town of the mint and the date on the other. Copper money was more oval, and was imprinted with a lion and a sun instead of the name of the Shah. Another bit of interesting information is that goods rarely were counted in *ʿabbāsīs,* but in *larins*. *Larins* were the currency of Basra. They were in the shape of a doubled up thread of silver, about two fingers wide on which the name of the ruler appears.

8 silver *larins* = 1gold
80 silver *larins* = *tūmāns* or 200 *ʿabbāsīs*
1 gold (abstract measure) = 5 *ʿabbāsīs*.

[19] CHINON 1671, p. 254.

[20] CARSWELL 1968, p. 13.

concerns. No church officials were present at this assembly of merchants[21].

The term mercantile oligarchy is appropriate since administrative power was in the hands of a few important trading families. The *kalāntar*, often the most prominent merchant among them, chose the heads of the neighborhoods. The ready access he had to court, and the intimacy of the Shah with the Armenian *kalāntar* and his family, have been pointed out in many travel accounts concerned with the reign of Shah ʿAbbās, as well as in the writings of the historian Aṙakʿel[22]. Moreover, since this municipal assembly of merchants acted as the civil court for merchant affairs, the *kalāntar* acted in the capacity of a civil judge in certain legal matters. It was the central civil court for both litigations and other legal transactions that might have occurred as far away as India or Holland. If there was not a proper assembly of merchants to adjudicate the matter locally, in France, Italy, Holland or wherever, the case was referred to the assembly of merchants in New Julfa[23].

In addition to the *kalāntar*, there was a second official appointed by the Shah for the administration of New Julfa:

> They yearly pay the King 500 *Tomans*, and have an Armenian to Govern them, whom they call *Kelonter,* that is to say the greatest, and he is put in and turned out by the King when he pleases. They address themselves to this *Kelonter* in all their Affairs, and Controversies, and it is he that Taxes them for raising the five hundred *Tomans*, which they yearly pay the King. But besides the *Kelonter* they have another Royal Officer, who is a *Deroga*, for judging their criminal affairs[24].

The official refered to in this passage, the *dārogā,* was the judge for local Armenian affairs. He was most probably from the Armenian community though it is debatable and the texts are confusing as to the manner of his appointment. Daulier-Deslandes writes that "he is a judge of their religion that they have the King agree to[25]." This leads to the conclusion that he was chosen by the community then officialy accepted by the Shah.

> The King names who he pleases among the Armenians to be their chief and to govern them under royal authority. He is called Kelonter, and it is he who is their judge in the differences that can occur among them, and who taxes them to make them the sum they need to pay to the king every year[26].

[21] Xačʿikyan 1988, pp. 39-41.
[22] Aṙakʿel Vardapet Dawriżecʿi, ed 1990. See chapter V.
[23] Khachikian 1967, pp. 231-278.
[24] Thévenot 1687. Cited in Carswell 1968, p. 78.
[25] Daulier-Deslandes 1673, p. 51. Cited on Carswell 1968, p. 51.
[26] Tavernier 1981, Tome II, p. 152. Translation my own: "Le roi nomme celui qui

There is even more confusion over who the *dārogā* was. The passages consulted and cited here seem to confirm that he was an Armenian. A. K. Lambton has concluded in her articles that he was always Persian[27]. There is evidence in the texts to the contrary: "he is a judge of their religion that they have the King agree to[28]."

There were many craftsmen in New Julfa. Each craft had its own head dealt with its own affairs independently and held regular reunions[29]. Little is known about these groups of artisans[30]. The word 'corporation' tentatively might be applied to such groups, as there was some form of organization and administration within the crafts[31]. These craftsmen were, among others: goldsmiths, blacksmiths, printers (after 1640), masons, tailors, stonecutters, weavers, furriers, watchmakers (latter part of the century), and carpenters[32]. The head of all of the Armenian craftsmen *ustābāshi* seems to have had a role in the general administration of

lui plaît d'entre les Arméniens pour être leur chef et les gouverner sous l'autorité royale. On l'appelle Kelonter et c'est lui qui est leur juge dans les différends qui peuvent leur survenir, et qui les taxe pour faire la somme qu'ils doivent payer tous les ans au roi." All the transliterations are my own. There are no english translations of this work by Tavernier.

[27] LAMBTON 1963, pp. 206-18.

[28] DAULIER-DESLANDES ed 1673, p. 51. Cited in CARSWELL 1968, p. 78. The narrations of both Figueroa and De Bruyn confirm the fact that the Deroga was an Armenian. De Bruyn further makes clear that there was a Persian judge for criminal affairs which concerned the king. So several texts make it clear that the Deroga was an Armenian judge for common and civil affairs. See the citations of both authors picked out by CARSWELL 1968, pp. 77-81. Carswell was not concerned with this problem at all but fortunately picked out three passages which give information relevant to this point. It is not evident where A. K. Lambton found information to the contrary. Perhaps it is a confusion of terms between the Armenian judge for civil affairs and the Persian judge for criminal affairs. She merely states in her brief passage on New Julfa that the Deroga was always Persian.

[29] XAČ'IKYAN 1988, p. 36.

[30] There is a passage in CHARDIN which speaks of "the Polity of the Persian tradesmen." Though he does not mention the Armenians, if one wanted to extrapolate a hypothesis based on the local system in the bazaars, etc., this would be a useful passage. He seems to suggest that even if the trades had an appointed head accepted by the King, that is where their government stops–that it does not mean they form "a regular body." See: CHARDIN, ed. 1988, pp. 250-251.

[31] To my knowledge there is no social study of the artisans of New Julfa. For Armenian craft organization for the 18-20th century there is: ABRAHAMYAN 1971.

[32] See footnote 67, p. 680 in: GREGORIAN 1974. The information is from a Persian author, Raiin who cites no sources. The dates in the parenthesis are mine. The first printed book in Julfa is dated 1638. As for watchmaking, it was a European craft. Under Shah 'Abbās there were some exchanges that could have made it possible for Armenians to be trained either in Iran or Europe by European masters. What is certain however is the presence in Iran of an eminent Swiss Protestant watchmaker, now buried in the Armenian cemetery of Tabriz. His story is related by Jean Chardin in the latter part of the century.

New Julfa and to have been counted among the ranks of the other local officials[33].

There seems to have been three categories of merchants. There were those who never travelled and did not own local storehouses or store fronts, who entered into financial transactions and invested capital in the both local and international deals made by other merchants. They are referred to as Khojas. A second group of merchants, not as prosperous as the first, did not travel either, but owned both storehouses and store-fronts in the neighborhood of Naxš-e Jahān. The third group were the travelling merchants, or factors, among whom both wealthy and less prosperous merchants could be found, but none among them had the fortune of the Khojas[34]. It is to this group that the four or five most prominent families of New Julfa belong. The backbone of the commercial organization of this group was the Khoja-factor association. The khojas provide capital, the factors travel to augment it.

There are several sources which confirm that this *khoja* and factor association was a organized, codified, conscious system common to the Armenian merchants across the world. For details on this system there is a now published account book, by a factor from New Julfa[35]. The account book of Yovhannēs contains precious information on eleven years of commerce in India and Tibet. It is an invaluable, and unfortunately unique, example of the kind of ledger or legal register[36] kept by the Armenian factors abroad.

Until the appearance of the account book of Yovhannēs, little was known about these factors, save the few descriptions in travel accounts. The manuscript of the account book of Yovhannēs of Julfa, or Yovhannēs J̌ułayecʿi, is preserved in Lisbon. There are no details available as to how it arrived there. It was studied, annotated and published for the first time in 1984 in Erevan. Its publication is a major milestone,

[33] In studying a treaty between the Armenians of New Julfa and the Russian Tsar in 1671, Xačʿikyan identifies the 22 signatures on the treaty as belonging to the *Kalāntar*, the *Ustābāshi*, and the twenty *Tasnakawag*. See XAČʿIKYAN 1988, pp. 25-28. He therefore has some administrative importance, but nothing beyond this can be established in the present state of our knowledge.

[34] Both the Khojas and the factors are present in many sources but the middle group, the store owners, are absent from most sources. For a source on this group, see: XAČʿIKYAN 1988, p. 56. Her source for this is a conversation between an Armenian merchant from Julfa and a European merchant curious of their ways. The Armenian describes this hierarchy in the dialect of New Julfa. This is recorded in SHROEDER 1711.

[35] XAČʿIKYAN — PʿAPʿAZYAN 1984.

[36] There is a rūznāmah, or "account book" kept by one of the Lazarians in the 18th century. It has not been published, it is being worked on by XAČʿIKYAN 1988.

as it is a unique source for the trade history of the time. It offers precise information on the accounting system used by the factors, the merchandise bought and sold, the travel routes east of Persia (in this case India and Tibet), moneys, methods of payment, interest rates, as well as some insight into the factor's daily life and motivations. Yovhannēs himself was a factor for a rich merchant of New Julfa and travelled to further his own business interests as well as those of his master. He in turn had several servants in his service. He kept close accounts for travel expenses such as food and clothing. His account register is also a unique source of information on the number and nature of taxes levied on merchandise, as well as for the different kinds of officers in charge of tax assessment in different regions.

The manuscript of this account book is No. GG 7970 of the National Library of Portugal; it exists as forty-four detached folios. These pages are 18 cm wide and 54 cm long, therefore extremely narrow, as paper customarily was in Tibet and Far East[37]. The accounts are kept on these pages, recto-verso, for the eleven years from 1682-1693. Yovhannēs was at the service of a wealthier merchant, and the details of that contract are given at the beginning of his *rūznāmah* [diary].

There exists a later document, an eighteenth-century code of laws which embodies the rules of Armenian commerce. It was composed by the merchants of Astrakhan in 1765 in order to codify, in writing, what had been customary practice for the decades preceeding. It is preserved in Erevan in manuscript form, and has been consulted by Levon Xač'ikyan, one of the editors of the account book of Yovhannēs. The terms of the contract between a *khoja* and a factor can be found clearly described in the general terms of customary law in the *Canons of True and Established Law*, referred to here as the Astrakhan Canons.

According to the Canons, the factor is termed an 'associate', and the *khoja* is referred to as the *ałay*. The following presents the terms outlined in article 11 of Chapter XIV called "*Of the Rights of the Merchants*[38]": the factor must keep a clear account book and present it on his return; if he fails to do so he can be starved and whipped and imprisoned for up to a year; he must return at any time his *ałay* wishes him to; if he fails in any of his duties all the profit goes to the *ałay* and all the losses to the factor.

[37] KHACHIKIAN 1967, p. 233.

[38] Maštoc' Madenadaran Ms. no 7383 p. 57. All this can be found in the introduction to the published manuscript of Yovhannēs. We have not had access to this source and rely here on Xač'ikyan and P'ap'azyan's work in Armenia.

This evidence vividly demonstrates that the code was quite strict and one-sided. The venture fraught with personal risks for the factor executing the contract. The factors alone faced the dangers and hardships of travel on the routes to Europe and to India. Many testimonies by seventeenth century travellers such as Fryer and Chardin give the profit of the factor to be one fourth of the total profit. Tavernier stresses that the incompetant and dishonest ones never went back to New Julfa because of the certain fate that awaited them there[39]. Their knowledge of the system helps demonstrate that the law above was a codification of what had been customary a century earlier when these European merchants visited New Julfa.

The wealth of a New Julfa merchant was estimated neither by the goods he owned nor by his house and its furnishings but by his capital alone. The amount of his capital represented the potential by which that very wealth could be augmented by future ventures:

> They are so well advanced in commerce that several of them have left behind from two thousand to twenty thousand tomans. But the most powerful who has appeared among the Armenians is called Cotgia Petrus (Cotgia means *Monsieur* or *Seigneur*)[40], he left at his death forty thousand tomans of moneyed silver, without accounting for his houses, his country possessions, his jewelery, his table settings of gold and silver and his rich furniture. Because in Persia, neither the Mahometans nor the Christians count among the riches of a merchant his furniture his houses, his lands, but only the cash money available for commerce[41].

[39] For they do not only go to Europe, but run to the depths of Asia, the Indies, Tonkin, to Java, the Philippines, and in all of the Orient, to the exception of China and Japan. But when they do not deal their affairs well, they do not go back to Isphahan, because it is a place where one has to give exact accounting and where a good and short justice is applied, the blows of the stick are not rare for the factors who have not well spared the goods of their masters, in TAVERNIER, ed. 1981, Tome II, p. 150. If the beginning of this quotation sounds very familiar it is because the information in it was appropriated by Braudel, and every article ever written in France on the Armenian merchant cites him. The end of this quotation which is much informative is always omitted. "Car ils ne vont pas seulement en Europe, mais ils courent jusqu'au fond de l'Asie, aux Indes à Tonquin, à Java, aux Philippines, et par tout l'Orient, à la reserve de la Chine et du Japon. Mais quand ils ne font pas bien leurs affaires, ils ne reviennent plus à Isphahan, parce que c'est un lieu où il faut rendre compte exactement et où l'on rend aussi bonne et courte justice, les coups de bâton ne manquant point aux facteurs qui ont mal ménagé le bien de leur maître."

[40] This term is left untranslated because its English approximations are misleading.

[41] TAVERNIER, ed. 1981, Tome II, p. 151. The original reads: "Mais le plus puissant qui ait paru de tous les Arméniens, appelé Cotgia Petrus (Cotgia veut dire Monsieur ou Seigneur) laissa en mourant quarante mille toumans d'argent monnayé, sans compter ses maisons ni ses biens de campagne, ses pierreries ni sa vaisselle d'or et d'argent et ses riches meubles. Car en Perse, ni les mahométans ni les chrétiens ne comptent point entre les richesses d'un marchand ni les meubles, ni les maisons, ni les fonds de terre, mais seulement l'argent comptant pour négocier."

This passage also confirms the usage of the title *khoja* to refer to the wealthy Armenians. Tavernier seems to understand the term to be no more than an honorific. The importance of cash capital for the Armenian merchants is further substantiated by their methods of conducting commerce. Although the association for one fourth of the profit seems to have been customary, as three sources confirm, there seems to have been other forms of associations.

The main form of contract, described above, is between a merchant or merchants providing all of the initial capital, and the factors who provide none but gets twenty five percent of the profit. These contracts were often exclusive. A factor at the service of a master could not work for anyone else. He could, however, as in the case of Yovhannēs in India, form new associations of his own with other merchants of his own rank. Contracts between factor and khoja were referred to in Armenian as *mēkkołmani,* which means "one-sided". For other forms of contracts, however, no norm existed. These were called "two-sided" contracts, or in Armenian *erkukołmani*. This type of contract implied that all contracting parties provided capital for the venture. The percentages for profit varied greatly, and did not simply depend on the amount of capital an associate put in. These contracts were the contracts of individual associations among merchants or entire families of merchants for either one or several ventures. The terms of these contracts were redetermined each and every time among the associates[42].

Was there anything unique to the Armenians in these contractual forms? Some of the terms used by the Armenians such as *barāt* [patent], *amānat* [deposit], *yak gūshah* [one sided contract], *dū gūshah* [two sided contract] are Persian terms used by Armenian factors[43]. We believe it indicates clearly that the contractual system they used was current in Iran. Chardin confirms that the system of sending factors out was common to all Eastern merchants:

> The Eastern Merchants affect Grandure in Trading, notwithstanding they send their Deputies into all Parts, and stay at Home themselves, as in the Center of their grand Concern; they make no Bargains themselves directly, there is no publick place of exchange in their Towns; the Trade is carried on by Stock-jobbers, who are the subtilest, the cunningest, the slyest, the complaisantest, the patientest, and the most intriguing Men of the whole Society, having a valuable and insinuating Tongue beyond Expression: They are called *Delal*, which answers to Great Talkers, that

[42] Xač'ikyan 1988, pp. 121-136.
[43] *Ibid.*

> Word being of a contrary Signification to *Lal*, i. e. Dumb. The *Mohametans* have a Proverb alluding to the Name of those Men, viz. That at the last Day, *Delal Lal,* the Stock-jobbers, or Talkers, will be Dumb; intimating that they will have nothing to say for themselves[44].

Therefore, the Armenian association between khoja and factor apparently was common to the area. In seventeenth-century Europe, the system employed was very much the same, familiar to trade historians as a *Commenda*. The *Commenda* was mostly for maritime trade, since the trade of the Venetians or Genoans, as well as that of the French the British and the Dutch, was mainly maritime. It is, however, essentially the same system; the rich Venetian merchant remains at home, while his factors manage his affairs abroad. The European Companies of the seventeenth century also used this very system. The shareholders stayed in Amsterdam, London, Paris or Lyon and let merchants of lesser financial importance, not to mention fortune hunters of all kinds, run their errands. The Armenians favored land routes, except for trips to India where sea travel was customary[45].

Although uncorroborated received wisdom has maintained that the Armenians merchants were intermediaries for other parties[46], this generalization has been deduced solely from the misconception that Shah ʿAbbās handed them the right to export Persian silk. For Safavid trade in general, this early period is the only period that has been studied to any significant extent[47]. In actuality, the Armenian khojas outbid the English East India Company and won the monopoly on the exportation of Persian silk by literally paying for it. In two steps they established a quasi-monopoly over the exportation of the Persian silk from Iran.

In 1618, a minor Armenian merchant made an offer to reopen the Turkish route for export despite the ongoing war, and pay a duty of five *tomans* per load exported. The Shah immediately accepted. The English mistakenly did not take the recent royal monopoly on the production of

[44] CHARDIN, ed. 1988, p. 280.

[45] For a discussion of routes and merchandises, see: BAGHDIANTZ 1993, chapter V.

[46] This is implied or clearly stated in many general works not specifically dealing with the Armenians. The list is too long to cite here. Recently, this misconception has appeared in a study which devotes an entire chapter to the Armenians: CURTIN 1984. When speaking of the Armenians under Safavid rule Curtin states "This new base, and the Shah's patronage, gave the New Julfa Armenians an opportunity to further their own commercial interests by helping the shah with his." It is, as in this case, most often implied that they served the Persian court or that the Shah was their patron. Later at the end of the seventeenth century the assertion of their cooperation with England or with France arises and is generally upheld. See: FERRIER 1970, and ID. 1973.

[47] STEENSGAARD 1973, and a recent dissertation: STEINMANN 1986.

silk seriously enough. When he declared that silk for export would be auctioned off to the highest bidder, the English Company would not go above 43.2 *tūmāns*. The Armenian merchants, after an initial hesitation, bid a price somewhat higher than the market price–fifty *tūmāns* per load of thirty-six *mānn-i-shāhī*[48]. The English had been rendered helpless by good mercantile diplomacy. The Armenians had outbid the Company and offered to travel the dangerous Turkish route which was closed due to war. The Shah was not interested in the southern sea route so long as the Turkish route remained viable. Nor did he need the English East India Company to move his silk, since he had the better offer. Contrary to English suspicions, the Shah had not extended credit to the Armenian merchants for the purchase of the silk, thereby facilitating their success[49].

In addition to the silk trade for which they are well known for, the Armenians had another economic power. So far no one has studied or even noticed their quasi monopoly on importing silver Bullion into Iran. Several sources attest that Armenian merchants shared one very important characteristic in their transactions: they sold against cash, not against other goods. There are several testimonials to this. Tavernier, as quoted earlier, states clearly that the Armenians preferred to trade with the French at Smyrna, because the French would pay them in currency, and did not require that they accept partial payment in goods.

> The merchants who are for the most part Armenians prefer selling their merchandise to the French rather than to the other nations of Europe because they pay in money as opposed to the English or the Dutch who obligate them to taking half of their payment in cloth[50].

He does not say that they refused to sell to the English or the Dutch, but says they preferred the French "parce qu'ils paient tout en argent." Archival evidence preserved in the Amsterdam municipal archives confirms this insistence on cash payment:

> … that it is customary among Armenian or Persian merchants never to sell otherwise than against cash payment. Giving for the reasons of his knowing this that he sold his merchandise for cash money on two occa-

[48] A *mānn* is a measure of weight varying between forty and eighty-four pounds, depending on local custom. STEINGASS 1977, p. 1316.

[49] STEENSGAARD 1973, pp. 323-334.

[50] TAVERNIER, ed. 1981, Tome I, p. 141. The original reads: "Les marchands qui sont pour la plupart arméniens, aiment mieux vendre leur marchandise aux Français plutôt qu'aux autres nations d'Europe, parce qu'ils payent tout en argent, au lieu que les Anglais et les Hollandais les obligent à prendre une moitié de leur payement en draps."

> sions and never saw any Armenian or Persian goods being sold otherwise than for cash[51].

This evidence, found in notarial papers, is the testimony of one Armenian merchant Gregorio, whose original name one may guess was Grigor, on behalf of his compatriot Theodat. It is much more affirmative than the evidence offered by Tavernier. Gregorio affirms that he never saw any Armenian or Persian goods sold against other goods, only for cash.

This is extremely significant testimony. It directly implies that the Armenians only sold to the Europeans against cash remuneration, and did not accept European goods in exchange, which would have made them *de facto* intermediaries for the European merchants on their route back to Persia. It is clear from the sources that they bought European cloth or other goods to trade of their own free will with their cash, but that is quite different from accepting cloth as payment[52].

There is further evidence as to the importance of cash for the Armenians. Tavernier narrates that there were several mines of gold and silver in Iran, but that their exploitation was so profitless that it had given rise to a general expression for labor lost. There was a paucity of gold and silver in circulation in Iran and much hoarding. The Armenians played a unique and crucial role in the economy of Safavid Persia—they were the only source for gold and silver from Europe[53], as Europe was Iran's main source of gold and silver, followed by India:

> So all the gold and silver of Persia comes from foreign lands, and particularly from Europe, as I have said in the chapter on moneys. Since the reigh of Shah ʿAbbās I to the reign of Shah ʿAbbās II, one saw more silver in Persia than presently; and the Armenian merchants brought it from Europe to Persia where it was reduced to local money. But since a few years they only bring ducats and sequins as being more portable[54].

[51] This was found in the Municipal Archives of Amsterdam, in the notarial papers that have been studied and classified under Armeniaca by the present vice archivar, Doctor Simon Hart. The above information and quotation is no 13.3.1656. It is to be found translated in: VAN ROOY 1966, p. 350. The original reads as follows: "Dat onder 'Armenische ofte persiaensche coopluyden noyt de manier is anders als voor contant te vercopen. Gevende redenen van wetenschap tot twe reyse toe sijne coopmanschappen voor contante penningen vercoft te hebben ende noyt anders als voor contante eenige armenische ofte periaenische goederen te hebben sien vercopen…"

[52] A complete list of the merchandise cited in the account book of Yovhannēs is to be found in the appendix of the account book.

[53] TAVERNIER, ed. 1981, Tome II, p. 94.

[54] *Ibid.* The original reads: "Ainsi tout l'or et l'argent de Perse viennent des pays étrangers, et particulièrement de l'Europe comme je l'ai remarqué au chapitre des monnaies. Depuis le règne de Chah ʿAbbās I jusqu'à celui de Chah ʿAbbās II, on voyait plus d'argent dans la Perse qu'on le voit présentement; et les marchands arméniens l'appor-

The significance of their being the single most important source for gold and silver cannot be overestimated. Tavernier additionally provides very important information on currency in Iran. He provides evidence that at the time silver prevailed in the economy:

> Firstly it is noteworthy, that gold money is not coined in Persia save for when the kings come to the throne to make liberalities to the people and a few coins always remain in the Treasury. So that gold is not a current and circulating money. When the triumph is gone those who possess the coins do not have the curiosity of keeping them as we would medals, and they take them to the money changers who give them their value in current local cash. These gold coins can be worth five francs and are the weight of our German ducats[55]. (…) Secondly, it has to be observed that all sorts of silver are good in Persia, in bars in silverware and in money, and it is taken for its weight[56].

Chardin confirms Tavernier's observation: "All Payements are made in Silver, Gold is not Current in trade[57]." There are other hints as to the importance of the Armenians in this major aspect of the Persian economy. All the silver that was coined with the king's effigy was brought in by foreign trade. There are references to the strict rules applied to currency in Iran, such as the following passage in Tavernier:

> As one is obliged in entering the kingdom, either in Erivan or in Tauris where currency is coined to declare all the silver one has for it to be melted and coined in the kings name, under penalty of a heavy fine for the countering parties if they are to be discovered. But if a merchant's affairs do not permit him to stop either in Erivan or in Tauris, and it is more practical for him to take his silver to the mint in Isphahan, he can just take a bill from the master of the mint in Erivan or Tauris by which it is attested that he has duly made his declaration[58].

taient de l'Europe en Perse où on les réduisait en Monnaies du pays. Mais depuis quelques années, ils n'apportent plus que des ducats et des sequins comme étant des espèces plus portatives."

[55] TAVERNIER, ed. 1981, Tome I, Chapitre 12, p. 190. The original reads: "Il faut remarquer en premier lieu, qu'on ne bat point de pièce d'or en Perse que lorsque les rois viennent au trône pour faire des libéralités au peuple, et il en demeure toujours quelques-unes au Trésor. Ainsi ce n'est point monnaie courante. Quand le triomphe est passé, ceux qui ont des pièces n'ont pas la curiosité de les garder comme nous garderions une médaille, et ils les portent au changeur qui leur en rend la valeur en espèces courantes du pays. Ces pièces peuvent valoir environ cinq francs et sont au titre de nos ducats d'Allemagne."

[56] *Ibid*., p. 191. The original reads: "En second lieu, il faut observer que toute sorte d'argent est bon en Perse, en barre, en vaisselle ou en monnaie, et on le prend pour son titre."

[57] CHARDIN, ed. 1988, p. 284.

[58] TAVERNIER, ed. 1981, Tome I, Chapitre 12, p. 191. The original reads: "Car on est obligé en entrant dans le royaume, soit à Erivan soit à Tauris où on bat monnaie, de déclarer

This single passage not only tells us that there were three mints at the time in Iran, but that all the silver entering the kingdom had to be recoined with the king's effigy under penalty of a heavy fine for false declaration or failure to declare. It has already been established here that the Armenians were the main source of silver and gold for Iran.

There are references to the Armenians being mint masters and customs officers in charge of collecting the duties and tariffs. Luckily, several names of mint masters and customs officials are cited in a seventeenth century diary[59]. According Zakʿaria of Agulis, who was writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, several Armenian mint masters succeeded each other at the mints of Tiflis and Erevan[60]. His own brother, Šmawon (Simon), was the agent for the Khan of Erevan, which was not only one of the major tax collecting stations, but as was seen above, one of the stations where one had to give over all of one's silver to be recoined. Šmawon, his brother, was also at the head of the Erevan mint. From Zakʿaria's description, the office was a prosperous, profitable one, and the tenure of the office could be negociated. Šmawon kept his office longer than the Khan. He retained his office under Najaf Ghuli, Abbas Ghuli, and Safi Ghuli Khan[61].

Further investigation in this domain would be of great importance as it would establish the Armenians as having a closed circuit between the export of silk and the import of silver through which they entirely controlled all of Safavid Iran's exterior commerce and currency flow. Were sufficient proof found of their controlling the mints throughout one could blatantly state that the economy of their host country was entirely in their hands.

It appears clear that the Armenians were the main source of currency for Iran. Still they didn't carry their money in the form of cash throughout the length of their journeys. They had an elaborate system of letters of exchange, the best source for these are the account book of Yovhannēs and some merchant contracts kept at the Matenadaran. They have been well studied and described by scholars in Armenia[62].

tout l'argent qu'on porte pour être fondu et battu au coin du roi, à peine d'une grosse amende aux contrevenants si on peut les découvrir. Mais si les affaires d'un marchand ne lui permettent pas de s'arrêter ni à Erivan ni à Tauris, et qu'il lui soit plus commode de porter son argent à la monnaie d'Isphahan, il n'a qu'à prendre un billet du maître de la monnaie d'Erivan ou de Tauris par lequel il atteste comme quoi il a fait dûment sa déclaration."

[59] Xačʿikyan 1988, p. 121-136.

[60] Zakʿaria Agulecʿi, ed. 1938.

[61] Zakʿaria Agulecʿi, ed. 1938, p. 81. See also: Xačʿikyan 1988, p. 191.

[62] Khachikian 1967.

Though this argument has been proffered that the commercial methods used by the Armenians were far more elaborate than those of the Persian merchants, who were depicted as still travelling here and there carrying bags of money[63], it does not accord with even the very little that is known about Persian merchantile practice of the period. Furthermore, as we have argued above, the use of Persian merchantile terminology by the Armenians to describe their own contracts indicates that the system was common to both.

A more plausible explanation for the seemingly disproportionately large role of the Armenians in the Iranian economy was their unusual political situation. They seem to have successfully parlayed their great political disadvantage into an economic and diplomatic advantage. As a people without a nation state they afforded privileges domestically and internationally which were not easily granted to nation states. For example, Turkey, at war with the Safavids until the treaty of 1639, would not have welcomed Persian merchants travelling its land routes. However, best examples which demonstrate this mechanism appear in their competition against the Companies themselves. The Armenians' presence greatly contributed to excluding the Companies from Persia. No concessions to the Europeans were necessary as long as the Shah had a safer channel through which to export his silk[64]. By this means the Safavids effectively staved off the system of capitulations already well established the Ottoman Empire.

The other example is from the end of the seventeenth century. The privileges extended to the Armenians delegation from New Julfa as a consequence of the treaty the separately negociated with Peter the Great[65] allowed them to commerce over the trade routes through Russia. This very privilege had been denied to the British and the Dutch by the Tsar, who was rightly suspicious that it would open the door to foreign political pressures and intervention.

Who exactly conducted these negotiations with the Tsar on behalf of the merchants of New Julfa? This treaty with Peter the Great has been closely studied by Š. Xač'ikyan, who demonstrates that the twenty-two signatories were the twenty-two neighborhood chiefs of Julfa who formed the local administration of New Julfa. Though her analysis denies the existence of a "New Julfa Commercial Company" in the manner of the other seventeenth-century companies, the sole history of

[63] JACKSON — LOCKHART eds, pp. 526-27.
[64] See the conclusion in GREGORIAN's article p. 671.
[65] XAČ'IKYAN 1988, and KÉVONIAN 1975.

New Julfa[66] affirms that a commercial company did exist–*Ěnkerutʿiwn vačarakanutʿean Hayocʿ J̌ułayu*, which translates best as "The Armenian Commercial Association of Julfa" or "Commercial Company of Julfa." Even though she denies the existence of a larger company in New Julfa, she has thouroughly studied the form of merchant association in New Julfa and Transcaucasia. She finds that there are in Transcaucasia and elsewhere family associations, headed by the oldest male member of the family. These associations are named after the family or the first name of this elder directing it. They do at times join non-Armenians for specific ventures[67].

Even if her denial of the existence of a large Company in Julfa is deemed incorrect, her findings on the structure of Armenian mercantile association seem valid. An examination of archival materials found in the notarial records of Amsterdam offer further proof that the family stood as the foundation of mercantile association[68].

There is no apparent mention of a large Armenian company in any of the European travel accounts of the time. Of course, the European travellers had little interest in Armenian internal organizational matters. There is, however, no doubt that Armenians' commercial system rested on this notion of association. The identification of the Armenian representatives in the treaty of 1667 confirms the political function of the merchant municipal council of New Julfa. Far from denying the existence of a company, it sooner confirms it. Whether it can be called a "Company" in the European sense is a more complicated matter.

Viewing the council with that comparison in mind, there are several elements which resemble the European Companies in structure and functionality. The richest merchants of Julfa were its directors. Just as with the European directors, their role was an administrative and financial one. They invested and remained at home. They ruled the commercial affairs of their fellow Armenians abroad by taking responsibility for their unpaid debts, and by pronouncing judgement on any litigations. New Julfa was a commercial center, and its administrators ruled over merchant matters. These elements speak for a parallel with the national companies formed in Europe. Furthermore, it exercised international political power, such as with the treaty cited above, comparable to the European companies who signed treaties independently of other political

[66] The history written in the nineteenth century by Tēr Yovhaneancʿ.

[67] Xačʿikyan 1988, pp. 116-121. For a joint venture between two Jews, two Armenians, two Persians and two Indian merchants: see p. 120.

[68] Van Rooy 1966, p. 353.

powers such as their respective governments. These elements notwithstanding, there is one major difference: the merchant municipality of New Julfa was the immediate governing body for the Armenian population in exile. Their role as municipal government for a people in exile granted them much more political power than the European company directors had in their own homelands. The Armenian company was also a government, though one subject to the Persian Court. Another characteristic which differentiates the Armenian Company from the European ones, and which persisted through the history of the four most prominent families of New Julfa, was precisely that the preferred system of association was the family association. Without going through the details of the fortunes of the Łazareans or the Šahrimaneans, which can be found in Tēr Yovhaneancʿ informative study, one can deduce a general rule: the family simultaneously was the basic unit for both Armenian merchant associations and community's social structure.

A good example is the Łazarean family, later founders of the Łazarean Institute in Moscow. Throughout their history, fathers worked with their sons, the sons with their brothers, cousins and uncles[69]. To a nineteenth-century historian of these families, like Tēr Yovhaneancʿ, this was so obvious he did not bother to mention or analyze it. He dwells on every factual detail available for these prominent families without once drawing the reader's attention to the factor common to the whole system: the family association. Seen in this light, the Armenian company was an expansive network involving many families, and accurately described as an association between the most prominent families of New Julfa.

It would be impossible to understand the merchant organization, or the administration of New Julfa, without the realization that the basic unit of the whole social structure was the family–*tohm* in Armenian[70]. Incautious but tempting comparisons to medieval Italian merchant families may spring to mind. The Armenians of New Julfa had the family as the basis of both their political and commercial systems. This was neither new to the Armenians, nor a feature of the Diaspora or the merchant class. It was the ancient system the landed aristocracy of Armenia had always favored, and the basis on which they functioned. There is, however, a major difference between the merchant families of New Julfa and those of Italy. Because New Julfa's families lived under Persian

[69] There is a long chapter in TĒR YOVHANEANCʿ 1980 on the Łazareans.

[70] For a full discussion of the Armenian *tohm* as a structural unit of the feudal organization of the Armenian kingdom see: ADONTZ 1970.

rule, its merchants, no matter how wealthy, could not raise the armies of mercenaries of which the Sforza or the Medici could avail themselves. Furthermore, there is complete dearth of the necessary evidence concerning New Julfan guild organization which might nudge the comparison toward viability. Otherwise, there is much in common, vast and richly decorated houses[71], patronage of the arts, international contacts, financial support of the church, political and administrative power over their respective groups.

As for additional parallels with the centralized European Companies, the existence of a commercial manual, first noticed by F. Braudel and then presented by a scholar in France, encourages further speculation. In 1699, a manual for international commerce, prepared by Łukas Vanandecʿi, was printed by Tʿovma Vanandecʿi in Amsterdam on the Armenian printing press established there[72]. However, because of the nature of the work, it could not have been the product of a single author. Rather, it must have been the collected work of the merchants of Julfa, as Łukas suggests on the title page where refers to himself as the "vile assembler," not as the "author." The work itself is a manual of weights and measures, as well as of currencies across the world, written for the use of Armenian merchants involved in international trade. The *Ganj čʿapʿoy , kšřoy, tʿwoy, ew dramicʿ bolor ašxarhi* (*Treasury of measures, weights, numbers and moneys of the whole world*)[73] contains itineraries, various taxes, and as its title indicates, the weights, measures and moneys of the world. It was printed at the request and the expense of an Armenian from New Julfa, Xačʿatur Jułayecʿi. The language is that of

[71] Several travellers describe the Armenian houses of the rich Khojas. Gabriel de Chinon clearly states that apart from the Shah palace there was no place as beautiful as the house of the Šafraz. See CARSWELL 1968, p.78. who has also studied the plans of some remaining houses in New Julfa, but the richer houses that were located on the Northern bank of the river are no longer there.

[72] For a description and a bibliographical history of the manual see KÉVONIAN 1975, pp. 199-244. This French scholar was the first to publish anything about this manual.

[73] The exact title in Armenian is: *Ganj čʿapʿoy, kšřoy, Tʿwoy, ew dramicʿ bolor ašxarhi. Or ē gitutʿiwn amenayn tesak čʿapʿocʿ, kšřocʿ", ew dramicʿ orov bolor ašxarhi vačaŕakanutʿiwn vari; žołoveal ew i mi vayr hawakʿeal ašxatutʿeamb Łukasu apašnorh cʿankali Vanandecʿwoy. Caxiwkʿ ew i xndroy haycʿman hatcʿman J̌ułayecʿi Xačʿaturi ordi Paron Petrosin. Tpiwkʿ ew hawanutʿeamb eŕamec vehi Tʿovmay vardapeti ew srbapʿayl episkoposi Vanandecʿwoy Tann Gołtʿneancʿ. yAmi teaŕn. 1699, yunuari 16. yAmsterdam.* (A Treasury of measures, weights, numbers, and moneys of the whole world. Or knowledge of all sorts of weights, measures and moneys that rule the commerce of the whole world. Assembled and collected within the same work by the work of Łukas of Vanand. At the expense and request of Peter son of Xačʿatur of Julfa, published under the direction of the thrice great sublime doctor and blessed bishop Tʿovma of Vanand of the house of Gołtʿn in Amsterdam in the year 1699 on January 16).

the Armenians of Julfa, a heavily persianized commercial and contractual dialect, incomprehensible to other merchants, such as those from Lvov or Constantinople. Dates are given according to the Azaria calendar, which was created in New Julfa and is specific to that Suburb[74]. The manual was commissioned by Xačʿatur of New Julfa. It could only have been of use to the merchants of New Julfa. This level of shared information among them speaks for a large cooperative organization rather than a network of competing family groups. Commercial information of the kind contained in this manual would have been crucial to the success of a venture, and consequently would never have been shared with competitors. It stands as one of the best proofs of a well-organized Company. At the end of the century many of the wealthy families were leaving New Julfa for other destinations, such as Venice, Moscow or India, and a manual would have then been even more crucial to their organization, since the headquarters was no longer in New Julfa.

Most of the sources consulted here date from the end of the seventeenth century and speak of the continued prosperity of the Armenians of New Julfa. The end of the century had not been studied and had been summarily dismissed as a period of decline. In fact, it was not so much a period of financial decline as a period of unusual persecution for the rich merchants. The forced conversions to Islam under Shah ʿAbbās and the consequent brutalities endured by the poorer Armenians of the other parts of the suburbs had not previously touched the rich[75]. Beginning in 1671, the religious climate became much more difficult for the Armenians.

Under the reign of Shah Suleimān, also named Shah Safī II, the Armenian community was suddenly burdened by extremely heavy taxation. This time New Julfa was not exempted. By order of a royal *farmān* in 1671 all Armenian churches were taxed according to their importance, for a combined total of 424 *tūmāns* a year. The churches of New Julfa, Pʿērya and Buṙvaṙ are enumerated in the *farmān*. During Shah Suleimān's reign there were a total of seventy-one Armenian churches in these three suburbs of Isphahan, all of which are listed in the *farmān*. What is generally known as "New Julfa" comprised two different neighborhoods: "Old Julfa", the neighborhood first settled by Shah ʿAbbās I; and "New

[74] For more detail on the language of Julfa, see the painstaking annexe of translations to the account book of Yovhannēs, elaborated over ten years by Xačʿikyan — Pʿapʿazyan 1984, and a short analysis of the calendar and the language in Baghdiantz 1993, pp. 74-79.

[75] See Chapter I in Baghdiantz 1993, for a description of the treatment of the Armenians under each Safavid Shah.

Julfa", the neighborhood settled after the displacements of Shah ʿAbbās II. The newer settlement is situated immediately South of the older one. These two groups of inhabitants, with a total of 20 churches, were responsible for 313 *tūmāns* of the total of the 424 *tūmān* taxation[76].

A confirmation of this new taxation being effectively applied is found in Jean Chardin. He describes an attempt to have the taxes cancelled on March 15th in the year 1673:

> This same day, the clergy of Julfa, this large suburb of Isphahan, the abode of all the Armenian Christians, which is on the South side of the river, went with their patriarch preceding them to present a request to the prime minister to discharge them of the taxation imposed on the churches of Julfa. They had hoped that he would answer them favorably but they were mistaken. He told them that they either had to pay the tax or destroy their churches. The tax is of 6000 écus per year for ten churches. The Grand Vizir who is now in function imposed them two years ago[77].

According to Stepʿanos Erēcʿ and to a colophon found by Tēr Yovhaneancʿ this taxation was brought about by the revenge of a disgruntled Armenian ecclesiastic. His ambitions having been thwarted by his own church, the Armenian priest, by the name of Yohan, converted to Islam. He managed to convey to the Shah the idea that the Armenian churches were very rich in gold and silver and that it would be profitable to tax them[78].

Jean Chardin relates a similar, but far more important, occurrence of voluntary conversion in 1673:

> The 24 was a day of affliction for all the Christians of Isphahan and especially the Armenians because of the revolt of their chief or governor named Agha Piri Calentar; that is to say provost of this big suburb of Isphahan where they live. He was a semi-scholar who had read Avicenna and other Arab philosophers as well as Moslem polemicists and could not solve their objections; therefore he was more seduced by the blindness of a spirit of error than by mere voluptuousness[79].

He knew that his voluntary conversion would create unprecedented problems and much aversion among the Armenians as he was the most

[76] Tēr Yovhaneancʿ 1980, volume II, pp. 260-263. There is a complete translation of this *farmān* installing a new taxation policy. There follows a complete enumeration of all the Armenian churches, listed with the amount owed by each. This is a very interesting document. Not only does it provide a complete list of the churches, but gives a good estimation of their importance in the community. The highest tax was owed by the Church of All Saviour: 50 tūmāns.

[77] Chardin, ed. 1983, volume II, p. 218. The sum mentioned here does not correspond to anything clearly stated in the *farmān*.

[78] Tēr Yovhaneancʿ 1980, volume II, pp. 258-59.

[79] Chardin, ed. 1983, p. 232.

prominent member of their community. Two weeks before his formal apostasy he went to court and begged the Nazir to make it seem like an act committed under violence. To convince the Nazir to help him he not only presented him with 600 ducats but predicted that if his conversion were to be known as a voluntary apostasy, the Armenian merchants who were abroad on business would seize the opportunity to not come back. They would keep their goods and money and settle in Europe and this would cause a great loss[80]. And so it was done: the Nazir approached him and said very loudly, "the Shah orders you to become Moslem, he must be contented[81]."

Had his apostasy been an isolated incident, it still would be worthy of mention. Agha Piri, given the name Mohammad Piri after conversion, was not only the *kalāntar* of Julfa but one of the richest merchants in the country. Chardin writes that he owned a fortune greater than 2,000,000 pounds, and that the Moslems considered his conversion a great victory[82]. The conversion of the *kalāntar* is also linked with the French Capuchins later attempts to convert the Armenians to Catholicism. His apostasy did not remain an isolated incident it had consequences for the whole community. The Patriarch and the entire community feared that they would be subjected to some violence after this conversion. Their anxiety was caused by the belief that their *kalāntar* had been converted by force. Though no violence occurred, they were put under significant pressure to convert *en masse*. The dialogue that is transmitted to us by Chardin between the Prime Minister and the Armenian Patriarch who had been ordered to appear before him is a revealing one:

> The Prime Minister sent for them and told them that "the King had a great zeal for their conversion, and as for himself, it would be the greatest joy of life and his ministry if they were to embrace the true religion." They answered trembling that "His Majesty had a world of Moslem slaves and that he could through His Goodness let the lowest of all his slaves live in the religion of the Prophet Jesus, and leave them their churches where they did nothing more often than pray for the life of His Majesty and his ministers." They also let it be understood that if they converted, their couriers who were in Europe would not come back, and that this would cause the State the loss of immense wealth[83].

It seems that the argument that not only their merchants would not come back, but that the Christian princes of Europe would not let them

[80] *Ibid.*
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] CHARDIN, ed. 1983, p. 233.
[83] *Ibid.,* pp. 234-5.

commerce in their dominions if they were Moslem, swayed of the court. They were submitted to no further pressure. This incident also had other repercussions. It led to a direct correspondence from the Patriarch to the Pope at the urging of the French Capuchins. What is clear is that their wealth, their strategic and commercial importance saved them from forced conversion to Islam. At the end of the century under pressure from both Catholicism and Islam, a voluntary exodus to India and Russia began. The Šahrimaneans already Catholic converts established themselves in Venice. For those clinging to their Apostolic faith Russia and India represented more neutral territory. The garb of the itinerant merchant was not one that required conversion. They could no longer remain in New Julfa and preserve their faith. Just as Chardin describes the religious predicament in the same space he affirms that they still have the silk trade to themselves.

> *Silk* is the Staple commodity of *Persia*. They get some in the Province of *Georgia,* of *Corasson*, and *Caramania,* but especially in *Guilan,* and *Mazenderan*, which is *Hircania*. They compute that *Persia* brings yearly two and twenty thousand bales of *Silk,* each Bale weighing two hundred and seventy Pound Weight; the *Guilan*, ten thousand; *Mazendaran,* two thousand; *Media* and *Bactria,* three thousand a piece; that part of *Caramania*, called *Caraback,* and *Georgia,* each of them two thousand; and that Account increase every Year, because *Silk* improves continually. There are four sorts of *Silk*; the first, and the worst, is called *Chirvani,* because it comes chiefly from *Chirvan,* a town of *Media*, near the *Caspian* Sea, it is a thick and rough *Silk,* and the coarsest thread of the shell. It is what they call *Ardache* in *Europe*. The second, which is a Size better, is called *Karvari*, i.e. an Ass-load, to denote the type of *Silk,* which the Unskillful buy: We call it *Legia,* in our Country, probably from the word *Legian,* a small town of *Guilan,* on the Sea, where none but such a sort of *Silk* is made. The third is called *Ketcoda Pesend,* as tho' one should say, the Citizen sort, which name the *Persians* give to all things of a middling Character. The fourth, is called *Charbaffe*, i.e. *Brocade Silk;* because the best *Silk* is used for those rich Goods. The Abundance of the *Persian Silk* exported is too well known, to say much of it. The *Dutch* import of it into *Europe* to the value of near six hundred thousand Livres, by the *Indian* Sea; and all the *Europeans* who trade in *Turkey* Import nothing more valuable than *Persian Silks*, which they buy of the *Armenians*. The *Muscovites* import it likewise[84].

Few passages could so magnificently compensate for the silence of the Persian sources on late Safavid trade: precise figures for the production of silk by region, every grade of silk and its equivalent name in

[84] CHARDIN, ed. 1988, p. 282.

Europe (clear evidence that all grades, no matter how coarse, were exported), the major exporters and their habitual routes. Better still, the reaffirmation that the Armenians were still playing the same unique role over the same route: the Turkish route. It is unfortunate not to have the precise figures for the silk sold by the Armenians, as he so cordially offers the reader a figure for the Dutch exports. The passage also reports that the Dutch used the alternate sea route, and did not have recourse to the Armenians. Instead, they seem to have bought their silk directly in Persia. In addition could only trade against goods not cash in Iran[85].

Despite their continued prosperity, the wealthiest families took their wealth and skills and contacts elsewhere. The eighteenth century Astrakhan Canons speak for the continuity of their network. The commercial manual of the New Julfan merchants must have been in demand, for over half a century after its impression it was partially copied by hand in Astrakhan[86]. Once New Julfa ceases to be the headquarters for this large and well-established network, at a date that is not clear, the history trade becomes even more difficult to reconstruct.

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[85] For further details, see chapter V in BAGHDIANTZ 1993.

[86] The date is 1753, manuscript no 9284 of the Matenadaran, see in KÉVONIAN 1975, p. 201.

[87] On trouvera les références des éditions originales de Chardin, Daulier-Deslandes, Tavernier et Thévenot dans S. KÉVORKIAN "Répertoires des imprimés français du XVII[e] siècle sur l'Arménie et les Arméniens", *REArm* 15 (1981) pp. 462-467.

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